



IMPLEMENTING PRACTICAL SKILLS IN A DISTANCE LEARNING OF AGRIBUSINESS STUDY PROGRAM AT UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA

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ABSTRAK

Program Studi Agribisnis di Universitas Terbuka, dibentuk dengan tujuan untuk menghasilkan lulusan yang kompeten di bidang penyuluhan dan komunikasi agribisnis. Salah satu cara untuk mencapai tujuan ini adalah menyusun sebuah kurikulum yang mendorong terbentuknya hard skill dan soft skill lulusan yang relevan dengan tuntutan kompetensi program studi. Hard skill yang akan dimiliki lulusan merupakan aplikasi materi, metode serta evaluasi penyuluhan berbasis agribisnis yang nantinya akan diterapkan di lapangan, yang ditujukan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan sasarannya. Sementara softskill yang perlu dikuasai lulusan meliputi kemampuan-kemampuan berkomunikasi, bekerjasama dalam tim, kepemimpinan, dan kemampuan pemecahan masalah. Program Studi Agribisnis mengakomodasi pencapaian kompetensi tersebut dengan memasukkan beberapa mata kuliah berpraktikum di dalam kurikulumnya. Hal-hal yang dikaji dalam tulisan ini meliputi perbandingan pengelolaan penyelenggaraan praktikum antara program Penyuluhan Pertanian dan Agribisnis, termasuk kekuatan dan kelemahan masing-masing, berbagai kendala yang terjadi, serta peluang-peluang yang dapat diambil untuk memperbaiki penyelenggaraan praktikum. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pengelolaan penyelenggaraan praktikum PS Agribisnis pada prinsipnya masih mengadopsi dari pengelolaan penyelenggaraan praktikum yang digunakan Program Studi D3 Penyuluhan Pertanian, dengan keterbatasan-keterbatasan yang ada. Satu hal yang perlu diupayakan ke depannya adalah terbentuknya panduan praktikum yang jelas, serta pembinaan kerja sama dengan instansi lain guna meningkatkan kualitas penyelenggaraan praktikum.

Kata kunci: agribisnis, penyuluh pertanian, pendidikan jarak jauh.

ABSTRACT

The Agribusiness Study Program at Universitas Terbuka, the Indonesian Open University, was created with the goal of producing graduates who are competent in the field of extension and communication of agribusiness. One way to achieve this goal is to create a curriculum that develops competencies in both hard and soft skills that are relevant to the professional demands of graduates. Hard skills to be acquired include the application of methods and skills of agricultural extension that will be applied in the field. Soft skills include competencies such as the ability to communicate, work in teams, leadership, and problem-solving. The Agribusiness Study program allows graduates to acquire key competencies by incorporating some practical courses in its curriculum. This presentation will describe the comparison of practical implementation of the Management between an Agricultural Extension Study Program and the Agribusiness Study Program. The topics discussed in this presentation will address the implementation of practical management skills in the Agricultural Extension and Agribusiness Study Programs, including strengths and weaknesses, various obstacles, and how the obstacles were overcome. The result of

study shows that the managing of the practical implementation of PS Agribusiness basically can be done independently as long as the equipments can be provided as the need in field.

Keywords: agribusiness, extension agriculture, distance education

One of the characteristics of distance education is a physical separation between teacher with students (Wedemeyer, 1981; Budiwati, 2007; Schlosser and Simonson, 2009). These conditions require distance education institutions to have learning strategies that can support the increased competency of learners in terms of both understanding and application of science. Universitas Terbuka (UT) as a distance education institution, implements distance learning process by producing printed materials (BAC) as the primary course materials for students learning. In addition to BAC, UT also provides nonprinted materials (BANC) that serves as a supplementary and complementary course materials to BAC (Universitas Terbuka, 2011). Through BAC, students can learn about the concepts, principles, and procedures, that related to cognitive and affective learning abilities. While BANC could facilitate the students with a comprehensive cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning capabilities.

Bloom (1956) stated that learning process should be able to touch the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of the learners. Cognitive aspects of learning related to the intellectual abilities, such as critical thinking; affective aspects related to ability to behaved, such as having a certain attitude toward somethings, and psychomotor aspects related to the human ability to use any kinds of bodily organ, such as using foot for running, hand and foot for driving a car, etc. Good learning is learning that is able to hone into these three aspects of human capabilities in proportion. Building a cognitive and affective aspects can be done through the BAC approach and BANC. Psychomotor aspects of learning competence, which are generally related to cognitive and affective aspect, can be achieved by doing practicum.

The aims of practicum services are to provide students with the interactive learning opportunities, such as the interaction with the course content; the interaction with the instructor through a variety of practicum materials and the support facilities; and the interaction among students through a variety of practical activities. Through the process of an independent and guided practicum, and the maximum utilization of practicum facilities as a wholistic system of practical administration, the students are expected to be satisfied with optimum practical activities. Thus, psychomotor aspects of learning could be optimized in a satisfaction way as well.

Agribusiness Study Program is one of the studi program in the Faculty of Mathematics and Sciences UT (FMIPA-UT). This study program needs practical activities for students to establish the whole aspects of learning (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects). It has three areas of specialization, they are Agricultural Extension and Communication, Livestock Extension and Communication and Fisheries Extension and Communication. The graduates of the Study Program are expected to have competence as an extension agricultural / livestock / fisheries oriented agribusiness. Since a field instructors are required to have adequate skills in agriculture/livestock/fisheries, some practical activities are needed to form the extension competence.

Agribusiness Studies Program is a development of Agricultural Extension Studies Program offered since 1993. In 1999 the program received approximately 4500 agricultural extension agents from Department of Agriculture (Deptan) as a student. A large number of students demanding more practical and systematic management of program and monitored in all aspects, including the handling

of student practical activities. Fortunately, a quite complicated practicum can be managed by cooperating with Department of Agriculture. This department provides practical options by preparing appropriate residence for students and instructors who would guide students in doing practicum.

In line with the development progress and challenges of education, it is demanded a shift in the role and capabilities the field of agricultural extension agent become an extension specialists. Extension specialists are expected to become experts in their field and able to make a decision on the matter that will be extended based on various sources of information, including the results of research and technology assessment (FMIPA-UT, 2004). Based on that objectives, the Agricultural Extension Program which was originally an undergraduate diploma, trying to accommodate demands by changing levels of competence courses into strata S1, as Agricultural Extension and Communication Study Program in 2004. In 2008 Agricultural Extension and Communication Study Program had permission to continue the program by change its name to the Agribusiness Study Program, following the changes in the codification of the courses published by the General Directorate of Higher Education.

Practical activities is compulsory for students of Agribusiness Study Program. If the practicum scores had not entered yet into the data base students scores, then the grade of the course will not come out. Therefore, the management of practical activities becomes crucial. In accordance to the practical procedures at UT, the practical activities of Agribusiness Study Program should be held at the Regional Office (UPBJJ-UT) that has students of Agribusiness Study Program. UPBJJ-UT collaborates with local agencies that can assist the implementation of practical work, from the provision of instructors till the location and facilities of practicum. However, the cessation of the MoU with Department of Agriculture affect the management of this practical activity. The changing of Department of Agriculture institutional structure, is also an obstacle in the practical implementation of Agribusiness Study Program. This article is intended to expose the system of practical management at Agribusiness Study Program, compared to the practical management while still a Agricultural Extension Study Program.

Practicum

Practicum is a form learning activities that are intended to establish mastery of the applicative material. Practical activities often associated with science learning activities conducted in the laboratory (Romlah, 2009). The definition of practicum may also be associated with efforts to deepen the experience outside the laboratory context. Harijati (2001) suggested that the practicum is a learning activity which aimed to establish student mastery of material that learned through application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation theory; whether conducted in the laboratory, classroom, and in the field. Woolnough (Rustaman, 2010) put forward some practical purpose, as: (1) develop basic skills, (2) develop problem-solving abilities, (3) improve the understanding of learning materials. As a tool for developing basic skills, appropriate forms of practical work is to do exercises to practice the theory. As a tool to develop problem-solving abilities, practicum usually formatted as investigation or observation of a case. As a tool to enhance understanding of the learning materials, practicum can be efforted by the direct experience in the field. The results of the experience or the fact, could be formed as concepts or principles are understood by people who do the practicum. From this definition, practical activities are focused on real simulating, so that the psychomotor skills of students who do pracicum can be enhanced.

Universitas Terbuka who implementing an open higher and distance learning system, must also accommodate the achievement of graduates competency. One of which is requiring practicum

on the perceived need to achieve three learning competencies: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Because of the distance between students and lecturers or teachers, UT should devise practical implementation of such systems for its students. Universitas Terbuka has held face-to-face practicum system since a long time, that was done by UPBJJ-UT at each region. Generally, UT has been pointing procedure of practicum in ISO guidance (UT, 2011) which involves the central role of UT, UPBJJ-UT, instructors and partners in each region.

Management of Practical of Agricultural Extension Study Program

Agricultural Extension Studies Program is a forerunner to the formation of Agribusiness Studies Program. At the time it has established cooperation between Agricultural Extension Study Program (UT) with Department of Agriculture to conduct practical implementation. At that time, collaborative organization of practicum is one of the activities designed to enhance the qualifications of the field of agricultural extension agents under the coachee Department of Agriculture (Harijati, 2011).

Agricultural Extension Study Program organized a practical reference to guide the technical implementation of practicum. Agricultural Extension Studies Program, in this case, manages self-learning infrastructure includes practical materials, guidelines, guidance and assessment guidelines, and the management of academic administration includes registration, collecting students score of the practicum, and entering practical scores; while Department of Agriculture manages the implementation of practical activities are technically in location of students (FMIPA-UT, 2000). Universitas Terbuka and Department of Agriculture jointly have a responsibility to the process and the quality of practicum, by having the relevant tasks and functions.

In field, peripheral organizational structure of Department of Agriculture such as School of Agricultural Extension, Academy of Agricultural Extension, and the Academy of Fisheries help the implementation of student practicum in the region. Practical implementation guidelines states that the agency involved in the implementation of on-site practicum students are: Head of practicum division of lab activities, practical manager and instructor.

Head of practicum division is a unit that is responsible for the implementation of the practicum for students in the region of Department of Agricultural, in this case managed by the Academy of Agricultural Extension (APP), and the Academy of Fisheries (AP). This division in charge in coordinating all practical activities in the area of responsibility, develop a plan of practical activities include site readiness, infrastructure, human resources, time of implementation, and practicum monitoring together with UT. Practical manager who was responsible to direct practical activities at the location of practicum, usually was a technical implementation unit established by the APP/AP institutions. Their tasks were contacting the practicum instructors who has been appointed to prepare practical activities, provide the necessary facilities for the implementation of practical, arrange schedules and report on all practical activities to APP/AP as the head of practicum division.

One more division who importantly implementing practicum is instructors. The instructors are person who directly meet with students when doing practicum. Their tasks are guiding students, conducting evaluations and providing practical tasks for students. Practical instructors at that time also served as tutors who explain the materials of practicum and practical procedures. Finally the instructors should provide the practicum scores for students.

The description above shows that the Department of Agriculture has an important role as UT's partner in the management of practical activities for students of Agricultural Extension Study Program. However, UT is the key role throughout the process, because UT assisted by UPBJJ- UT setting up a

system ranging from data collection of students who was doing practicum, preparing modules containing practical material, providing practical guide, and managing the course grading system.

Management of Practical of Agribusiness Study Program

Study Program is the development of D3 Agricultural Extension Program. This program was established based on the market demands requires increasing competence of agricultural extension agent. The subject matters with practical aspect at this study program is not as much the subject matters with practical aspect at Agricultural Extension Study Program. Agricultural Extension Study Program has nearly 70% of practicum subjects, therefore Agribusiness Study Program contains only 20% practicum subjects.

In 2004, when Agribusiness Study Program is formed (formerly named Agricultural Extension and Communication Study Program), collaboration between UT and Deptan is over. It is practically affect the pattern of organization of practicum for Agribusiness students. For students who transfer (which is generally derived from agricultural extension), practicum has been done on the previous semester. In this case, practical activities still take place with still refers to the pattern of practical implementation of Agricultural Extension Study Program, with the same practical procedures.

The problems occurred after UT receives fresh graduate student (non-transfer students), which is derived from the high school graduates. Many practicum courses that must be taken, and with no link to the technical implementation unit under Department of Agriculture, making students find difficulties to carry out practical activities. These conditions require Agribusiness Studies Program to arrange for re-organizing the management of practical implementation that can facilitate students in conducting practicum. At the end of 2010, Agribusiness Study Program began to design appropriate patterns of practicum for students in the state and the current situation, and were introduced in semester two of 2011. The number of new transfer students and non-transfer in the period of 2005-2009 can be seen in Table 1. The data show that there is a tendency accretion of non transfer students in Agribusiness Study Program.

Table 1. Number of Students and Graduates of Program Study within 5 (five) years

Year	Number of new student			Number of Graduates		
	Transfer	Non-Transfer	Total	Transfer	Non-Transfer	Total
2005	909	173	1082	264	0	264
2006	148	313	461	250	0	250
2007	142	292	434	715	0	715
2008	81	995	1076	166	0	166
2009	8	972	980	124	6	130
Total	1.288	2.745				

The new version of practical management of Agribusiness Study Program is an independent practicum that can be done by students in their respective areas. There are two types of independent practicum, they are a field practicum and an individual practicum. The field practicum is conducted in the field by doing a survey, interview, or a pattern of practice/experiment/observation of the practicum object. While, an individual practicum is conducted independently by the student, can be done by groups or individuals. Individual practicum can be done as needed, for example in the laboratory, the student house, in the office where student work, or other places that deserve to be as a practicum site.

Units that involved and responsible for managing independent practicum are UT Head Office (Registration Unit, Examination Unit, and Study Program), Regional Center, and instructor/evaluator of practicum. Universitas Terbuka through a standardized system has a function as administrators of

academic administration include the registration of practicum subjects/courses which is taken by students, receiving practicum scores that have been validated by the head of the study program, and entering practicum scores. Agribusiness Study Program became the holder of the master control in the organization of practical implementation, playing a role in managing self-learning infrastructure, making the practical procedures and guidance, disseminating practical guidelines and implementation guidance to students and UPBJJ-UT, providing validation for the students scores of practicum and ensuring the scores of practicum have been entried already in the Examining Unit.

UPBJJ-UT is an learning units of UT which are generally closer to students location or domicilies, and is a place for students to perform academic and administrative activities. In Agribusiness practical activities, UPBJJ-UT have tasks to prepare a practical guidelines for students, a permit application of practicum requirement for students, and monitor the implementation of the practicum. This activity is managed by coordinator of Students Support ang Learning Materials Services of Regional Center (BBLBA - UPBJJ-UT). UPBJJ-UT also submit a practicum report to Central UPBJJ-UT which appointed to conduct the assessment of practicum report. Practicum reports examined by the instructor at UT UPBJJ Sentra. The assessment results submitted by the Central UPBJJ-UT to UT.

In the implementation in the field practicum, students often need guidance. Individual guiding practicum can be directly carried out in consultation with the lecture of courses, while coaching in the field can be done through consultation with the parties selected by the students themselves.

Based on the description above, the implementation of practicum of Agribussiness Study Program can be run independently by students. Students can set their own schedules and perform their practicum in the area closest to their houses. Communication between students with UPBJJ-UT and UT will be the key to the smooth implementation process of practical activities, and this is the essence of distance learning becomes more implemented.

Comparison of Management of Practical Activities between Agricultural Extension Study Program and Agribusiness Study Program

It has been described previously that there are differences in practical management system on Agricultural Extension Study Program with Agribusiness Study Program. Each course has its advantages and disadvantages of practical management systems that run. Table 2 presents the key points about the comparison of the two courses, in terms of strength, weaknesses, obstacles faced and the solutions to overcome.

Table 2. Comparison of Management of Practical between Agricultural Extension Study Program and Agribusiness Study Program

Item	Agricultural Extension Study Program	Agribusiness Study Program
Strength	The existence of the MoU between the UT with Department of Agriculture, which have an impact on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • availability of technical implementation unit practicum spread in every district • Easily obtain appropriate instructor of practicum in accordance with practicum materials 	Agribusiness Study Program becomes the main control of practical implementation and has full authority to regulate the implementation of the practicum by maximizing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • human resource competencies had in Agribusiness Study Program • information technology are able to bridge between students and the lectures to consultate about the subject matter UPBJJ-UT much involved in the practical management in the area

Table 2. (continued)

Item	Agricultural Extension Study Program	Agribusiness Study Program
weakness	UPBJJ-UT as the central area is not too much involved in practical activities. Coordination is usually done directly between Department of Agriculture with UT	The difficulty to manage the practical for students who are scattered in small quantities in each region. Coordination of the students is quite difficult
obstacle	The difficulty of monitoring a large number of students carry out practical work with actual performance. The Difficulty to monitoring each instructor in guiding practical work in accordance with procedures well	Direct monitoring of student practical activities is difficult.
solution	The student's score of practicum must be validated by the instructor and director of the APP. Periodically performed coordination meetings with the tutor coordinator to remind the tutor to work properly	Created a practical guide device, which requires the attachment of practical implementation of the evidence.

CONCLUSION

Practical activities must be implemented for courses that require psychomotoric competencies that must be owned by students. Agribusiness Study Program has several practical subject matter, thus the management of practical activities must be done properly in order to help students achieve learning objectives. . Management of practical of Agribusiness Study Program must have a new pattern which is different from management of practical of Agricultural Extension Study Program. It is mainly because it was the release of the MoU between Department of Agriculture and UT. The pattern management of practical should be able to reach students in all conditions and domicilies, by optimizing the competence of human resources in the study program and utilizing information communication technology.

The lack of cooperation with Department of Agriculture should not dampen the quality of practical work. With the strengths, weaknesses, and constraints that exist, the study program should be able to create appropriate solutions to overcome difficulties in managing the practical implementation. Patterns of cooperation during Agricultural Extension Study Program was attended can be adopted at least in obtaining instructor of practicum in the area. This is an attempt to anticipate the difficulty of communication, guidance and searching information directly with the lecture of practical subject matter at UT.

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